



Report to the Legislature

Accreditation of Children's Administration

Chapter 265, Laws of 2001, Sec. 2; RCW 74.13.017

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Accreditation of Children's Administration

Executive Summary

Chapter 265, Laws of 2001, Section 2, and RCW 74.13.017 require the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to provide an annual report to the legislature regarding Children's Administration's (CA) progress toward achieving accreditation of CA's child welfare offices. This law supports the efforts of CA to become accredited by a national accrediting body.

The Children's Administration selected the Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services (COA) as the accrediting entity. The COA was selected because it is the best fit for accreditation of public child protection/child welfare agencies. COA was the accrediting body selected for the pilot project that resulted in the successful accreditation of the Vancouver field office of CA in October 2000.

Congruent with legislative intent, each of the CA 44 field offices, as well as Headquarters in Olympia, will progress toward the goal of achieving accreditation by June 30, 2006.

The first eight offices and CA headquarters are currently in the final stage of the accreditation process and are scheduled for site visits with COA Peer Reviewers during the period February - April 2003.

During the early months of 2003, 10 additional field offices will pursue accreditation with a completion goal of spring 2004. In preparation, more than 60 staff attended an intensive two-day accreditation training with COA staff in November 2002.

COA is continually promoting quality improvement by actively revising standards in accordance with the latest research and evidence-based practices. The Vancouver CA office complied, as a pilot project, with the COA standards published in 1997. The remainder of Washington State will be required to meet the revised COA 2001 standards. These revised standards require a higher level of face-to-face contact with families, children, and caregivers. The additional FTE's allocated to CA in the current biennium budget are critical to the agency's ability to meet the revised COA standards. The current COA standards include policy and practice requirements related to Kinship Care. The work necessary to meet the Kinship Care standards within current resources will be the most significant challenge for CA.

Accreditation of Children's Administration

BACKGROUND OF THE ACCREDITATION INITIATIVE

The department's Children's Administration (CA) selected the Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services (COA) as the accrediting entity. The COA was selected because it is the best fit for accreditation of public child protection/child welfare agencies. The child protection/child welfare systems of Oklahoma and Illinois have been accredited through COA. In addition to the state of Washington, Kentucky, Ohio, and Arizona are actively seeking accreditation, while approximately 10 other states are considering initiation of the process. In states with county-administered child protection and child welfare systems, such as California and Colorado, some counties are accredited and others are in the process of becoming accredited through COA.

The Council on Accreditation was the accrediting body selected for the pilot project that resulted in the successful accreditation of CA's Vancouver field office in October 2000.

The Council on Accreditation has been a leader in the establishment and maintenance of standards for accreditation of private and public human service organizations since 1978. COA was formed with the support of the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), the leading organization promoting the wellbeing of children and families in the United States. CWLA has set standards for child welfare and child protection for many years. Leading private child welfare agencies in the United States and Canada are accredited through COA. In the state of Washington, the Children's Home Society of Washington is among the accredited private agencies, and the Chief Executive Officer of that agency is the current President of the COA Board of Trustees.

RELATIONSHIP WITH COUNCIL ON ACCREDITATION

Agencies applying for accreditation submit an application for accreditation to COA. A formal Accreditation Agreement (contract) is negotiated which specifies the services to be received by the applying agency from COA, the responsibilities of each party to the other, and the fees to be paid for accreditation to COA. A contract was signed for the Vancouver Office accreditation in 1999. CA completed its financial contract for accreditation on behalf of the department in May 2002. The corresponding Accreditation Agreement was completed in July 2002. The Accreditation Agreement lists the services to be accredited and includes an approximate timeline for completion.

ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

The Council on Accreditation has standards for all administrative and service delivery activity of CA. Services directly delivered by CA are accredited. Services that are contracted for are not accredited, but the contracting process itself is accredited. Public organizations, such as CA, that contract for services can make the policy decision to require contracted agencies to be accredited as a condition for contracting. Some states and counties have made that decision. CA has not made the decision to require contractors to be accredited. This issue is under study.

For administrative practices, the “Organizational and Management Standards” are utilized. For service delivery practices, the “Services Standards” are utilized.

Organizational and Management Standards include:

- Ethical Practices, Rights, and Responsibilities
- Continuous Quality Improvement
- Organizational Integrity
- Management of Human Resources
- Quality of the Service Environment
- Financial Management
- Training and Supervision
- Intake, Assessment, and Service Planning
- Service Delivery
- Administration and Risk Management

Services Standards include:

- Child Protective Services
- Foster and Kinship Care Services
- Adoption Services
- Family-Centered Casework

The Children’s Administration is applying for accreditation in four services standards areas encompassing all services directly delivered by the agency: Child Protection, Foster and Kinship Care, Adoptions, and Family-Centered Casework.

The Council on Accreditation Standards are revised every four years. CA is applying for accreditation under the 2001 Standards. The Vancouver Office received accreditation under the 1997 Standards. The standards will next be revised in 2005.

THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The initial COA Accreditation is valid for four years. Agencies must be re-accredited every four years.

The following description outlines the accreditation process.

- A Self-Study for the organization is completed over the course of approximately 15-18 months and is then submitted to COA.

The Self-Study is a written document containing self-assessment of the agency's performance with regard to each administrative and service delivery standard. It also includes citations of evidence from policy and procedure guidelines and performance data to support the description of practice.

- Site-visits are conducted for each office of the organization. Peer Reviewers trained by COA visit each office and headquarters to determine whether agency operation and practice meet the required COA standards.

Elements of the on-site visit include:

- Focus group interviews with stakeholders, service delivery staff, foster parents, supervisors and administrative staff
- Individual interviews with selected administrative and supervisory staff
- Sample case record review from every service delivery
- Evaluation of the agency self-study in the context of the on-site findings
- Review of personnel records
- Facility inspection
- The Council on Accreditation writes an Accreditation Report after the site visit and sends it to the agency. The agency has 45 days to respond. The agency must include corrective action plans in areas where COA deems the agency to be deficient. The agency must submit additional evidence as needed. The agency may contest the findings of the report

and offer evidence to support positions different from those taken by the peer reviewers.

- The Accreditation Commission of COA determines the accreditation status of the organization at its next scheduled meeting. Determinations may include full accreditation of the organization, a deferral pending provision of more evidence or a change in a practice, or denial of accreditation.

STATUS OF CHILDREN'S ADMINISTRATION ACCREDITATION EFFORTS

- Congruent with legislative intent, each of the CA 44 field offices, as well as Headquarters in Olympia, will progress toward achievement of accreditation by June 30, 2006.
- The Vancouver office was accredited in 2000 and is scheduled for re-accreditation in 2004.
- An accreditation schedule has been developed which plans for 8 - 10 offices to complete the accreditation process each year. A balance of urban and rural offices representing each region will proceed each year.
- An Accreditation Project Manager and two Accreditation Specialists positions have been established to support the CA accreditation initiative and to provide training and support to each of the 44 field offices to prepare for accreditation.
- The first eight offices and CA headquarters are currently in the final stage of the accreditation process and are scheduled for site visits with COA Peer Reviewers during the period February - April 2003. Each of these field offices (Aberdeen, South Bend, Long Beach, Tumwater, Moses Lake, Wenatchee, Omak, and Walla Walla) has an internal accreditation team. Members include a cross section of staff and stakeholders. Accreditation teams are preparing for the on-site COA review by reviewing and rating their offices' compliance with COA standards and improving practice to meet the required standards.
- During the early months of 2003, 10 additional offices will pursue accreditation with a completion goal of spring 2004. In preparation, more than 60 staff attended an intensive two-day accreditation training with COA staff in November 2002. The training was held locally in order to maximize the effectiveness of staff time and resources.

- Seventeen CA staff and three staff members from community partner agencies attended COA Peer Reviewer Training in November 2002. Completion of this two-day training allows staff to join COA accreditation teams as site visits are conducted at agencies in the United States and Canada.
- The Children's Administration statewide self-study was submitted to COA on December 13, 2002. Current state policy and procedure were compared with over 700 current best practice standards. The 10,000 page document substantiates compliance with COA standards.

ACCREDITATION CHALLENGES

The Council on Accreditation is continually promoting quality improvement by actively revising standards in accordance with the latest research and evidence based practices. The Vancouver office achieved accreditation by complying with the COA standards published in 1997. The remainder of the CA offices will be required to meet the revised COA 2001 standards. These revised standards require a higher level of face-to-face contact with families, children, and caregivers. The additional FTE's allocated to CA in the current biennium budget are critical to the Agency's ability to meet the revised COA standards.

Face-to-Face Contact with Children, Families, and Caregivers

Current CA policy requires social workers to make at minimum one visit to every child in foster care every 90 days. The revised 2001 COA standards require children in foster care, parents where the plan is reunification, and caregivers to receive a minimum of one visit per month. This represents a significant change in policy and increase in the amount of staff resources required to meet the higher expectation.

Children's Administration has developed a plan to meet this challenge. Changes will be made to policy and procedure to reflect the revised standards. Additional FTE's allocated in the biennium will be utilized to meet the required practice expectation.

Kinship Care

In previous COA standards, Kinship Care was not addressed. The current COA standards include policy and practice requirements related to Kinship Care. The work necessary to meet the Kinship Care standards within current resources will be the most significant challenge for CA.

In March 2002, CA had 3,879 dependent children placed with 2,715 relative caregiver families. Almost 90% of these children were in unlicensed relative

placements. Accreditation standards require that training and services provided to relatives are equivalent to those services provided to licensed foster care parents. CA is developing policy to meet this requirement and is making training currently available to licensed caregivers accessible to Kinship Care providers.